

Foster, already quieted by a visit from the Democrats earlier in the month, wrote Sprunt that he was unhappy to see that the businessmen did not select legislative candidates favorable to the Republicans but, instead, “practically turned it over to the political machine” which [he believed had] a majority in [Sprunt’s] joint committee.” The joint committee Foster mentioned was that of the Democratic Party Campaign Committee and the Merchant’s Association. Foster continued that he was “the first and strongest advocate of ... putting out no ticket in consideration of the business interest of the city, and the elimination of any possible race conflict” and “in consideration of the Governor’s generous proposition I trust that you, as the representative of the businessmen will see that no one is nominated who is as politically offensive to the Governor as the regular nominees were.” Foster concluded, “[T]his is only a reasonable request in consideration of what we are giving up.”³³

Furthering the tensions, the Democrats did not completely comply with the compromise, and additional discussion between Russell and Sprunt focused on the militant nature of the city’s armed whites. Russell sent a telegram four days before the election: “Am astonished to hear that merchants refuse to aid in preserving order if appeal is made to Republicans to vote . . . You know the agreement. I appeal to you and all conservative men to enforce it.” Sprunt ignored the increasing numbers of guns on the streets as he replied that he “conferred with several leaders and businessmen and so far as we are aware there has been no agreement understanding

or effort looking towards the use of any force or other disorderly methods of obstructing voters.” Sprunt closed the telegram with a promise to call his committee and send further communication the following day. The next morning Sprunt wired Russell again that the “Merchants and Campaign Committee will carry out agreement in good faith” although he indicated that other groups beyond his control were operating in the city.³⁴

Governor Russell issued a proclamation at the end of October in response to the heightened sense of militancy. The proclamation acknowledged “lawlessness in certain counties in this state . . . lying along the southern border of this state have been actually invaded by certain armed and lawless men from another state” and that “citizens have been taken from their homes at night and whipped.” Further, Russell knew that “in several counties peaceful citizens have been intimidated and terrorized by threats of violence to their persons and their property, until they are afraid to register themselves preparatory to exercising that highest duty of freemen—the casting of one free vote at a ballot box for men of their own choice.” Russell cautioned

“Memorandum,” Peter Mallett Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 615.

³³ Flavel Foster to James Sprunt, October 30, 1898, Alexander Sprunt and Son, Inc. Papers, Duke University Library, Durham.

³⁴ Some of those groups were possibly Populists and independent Republicans. Although no county ticket was mounted, Fusionists still lobbied Wilmington voters on behalf of their candidates for statewide and congressional seats. Printed circulars were distributed in the city to encourage “every man who is opposed to the Democratic machine” to vote for men such as Oliver Dockery, Fusionist congressional candidate. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 3 -5, 1898; *Morning Star*, (Wilmington), November 3 -5, 1898; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 651; Governor Russell to James Sprunt, November 4, 1898, Alexander Sprunt and Son, Inc. Papers, Duke University Library, Durham, 9:15 pm; James Sprunt to Governor Russell, November 4, 1898, 10:30 pm, Alexander Sprunt and Son, Inc. Papers, Duke University Library, Durham; James Sprunt et al to Governor Russell, November 5, 1898, Alexander Sprunt and Son, Inc. Papers, Duke University Library, Durham.